



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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SEATON ASKS LEGISLATIVE CONFIRMATION OF ARCTIC WILDLIFE RANGE

A draft of a proposed bill "to confirm the establishment of the Arctic National Wildlife Range and for other purposes" was transmitted today to the Speaker of the House of Representatives by Secretary of the Interior Fred A. Seaton.

In the accompanying letter Secretary Seaton noted that when the Arctic National Wildlife Range had been created by administrative action on December 7, 1960, he had recommended legislative action to give statutory protection to the Range and to carry out a commitment to allow mining under appropriate safeguards to protect conservation values.

Secretary Seaton noted that the bill is essentially the same submitted by the Department to the 86th Congress, but has been changed to include some suggestions of the Alaska Miner's Association, after consultation with national conservation organizations.

The changes provide for ingress and egress, and succession of interest in mining and mineral leasing interests, covered by implication in the previous draft measure.

The Secretary noted that he believes the proposed legislation is well adapted to the particular area and that it will provide a practical method of realizing wildlife benefits, permitting reasonable mining development and permitting necessary defense activities.

The bill would permit the Secretary of the Interior to administer and manage the Range in such manner as he finds in public interest and to issue rules and regulations for that purpose. The law would further provide that any patent issued for mineral deposits shall not convey any interest in the surface of the land containing those minerals other than to have the right of occupation and use of land reasonably required for operations. Appropriate reservations would be inserted in any mineral patent that might be issued.

In reviewing the status of public lands in northern Alaska, the letter states:

"The effect of the administrative action already taken has been to establish the Arctic National Wildlife Range within a specified area and to restore to public domain status a large area that was previously reserved by Public Land Order 82. Public Land Order 82 originally withdrew some 48.8 million acres of public domain lands in northern Alaska, and in addition approximately 18 million acres in southeastern Alaska which were subsequently restored to entry in 1946. In 1957 this Department opened to mineral leasing and mining claims approximately 20 million acres. Our recent action completely restores this acreage to public entry.

"In this connection, it should be noted also that Naval Petroleum Reserve No. 4, which is not affected in any way by the action that we have taken, accounts for approximately 23 million acres in the area originally covered by Public Land Order No. 82. This Department, on July 2, 1960, requested the Congress to restore this reserve to public domain. If the Congress honors that request, we will have brought about the restoration of 43.8 million acres to entry, and will have withdrawn only an additional 4 million acres to create the Arctic National Wildlife Range.

"This relatively small area should be retained for the important purpose of preserving the Nation's wildlife and wilderness values in that region. Recognizing that the defense requirements of our Nation are a major consideration, present or future Department of Defense operations in the area would not be affected under the terms of this bill. Furthermore, use of the area for other purposes would be permitted in a manner that would not impair the intent of the legislation."

The Arctic National Wildlife Range offers an ideal opportunity, and the only one in Alaska, to preserve an undisturbed portion of the Arctic large enough to be biologically self-sufficient. It comprises one of the most magnificent wildlife and wilderness areas in North America, being exceeded in extent only by Canada's Wood Buffalo Scientific Study Area, which is farther south and represents a different habitat.

Biologists declare that the only economically feasible opportunity for maintaining a wilderness frontier large enough for the preservation of the caribou, the grizzly, the Dall sheep, the wolverine, and the polar bear, all of which require a sizeable unrestricted range, lies in this northeastern Arctic region of the State. This area extends eastward from the Canning River to the Canadian Border and inland to include a portion of the south slope of the Brooks Range. At its largest dimensions, the area is roughly 120 miles from east to west and 140 miles from north to south.

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